



News Release

For immediate release: October 21, 2004

(04-123)

Contacts: Tim Church, Communications Office

360-236-4077

Number of adult smokers in Washington takes a healthy drop

12 percent decline means 115,000 fewer smokers since four years ago

OLYMPIA — The Washington State Department of Health announced today a 12 percent drop in the number of smokers in the state since the launch of the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program. That translates into about 115,000 fewer smokers statewide since the program began.

“We have successfully reduced smoking rates in Washington, so people can live longer, healthier lives,” Gov. Gary Locke said. “Everyone benefits from Washington’s Tobacco Prevention and Control Program – not only those who have quit using tobacco, but those who won’t start and all of us who have to pay for tobacco-related healthcare costs.”

Washington’s general adult smoking rate has dropped from 22.4 percent in 1999 to 19.7 percent in 2003. The state’s rate is now lower than the national median (22 percent), and Washington is now one of only 10 states with an adult smoking rate lower than 20 percent. With fewer adults smoking, about 38,000 early tobacco-related deaths will ultimately be prevented.

“Our anti-tobacco efforts save thousands of lives every year,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “Quitting smoking also saves the people of our state a lot of money. This drop in smoking will result in about \$1.4 billion saved in future medical costs, and that number will go even higher with continued success.”

Gov. Locke launched the state’s Tobacco Prevention and Control program in 2000 to reduce tobacco use in the state. The program currently is funded by the settlement of a lawsuit with tobacco companies, federal grants and cigarette taxes.

--more--

The Department of Health works with local health agencies, tribes, schools and community organizations to help people quit, encourage smoke-free environments and prevent young people from ever starting to use tobacco.

Making sure people have help in quitting is a cornerstone of the Department of Health's anti-tobacco program. More than 44,000 Washington residents have called the toll-free Washington State Tobacco Quit Line (1-877-270-STOP, www.quitline.com) for free counseling, referrals to cessation programs and free quit kits. The state has also trained thousands of physicians and other healthcare providers on how to provide cessation counseling.

Tobacco use still remains the leading cause of preventable death in the nation. Tobacco-related diseases kill about 8,000 people every year in Washington, more than AIDS, alcohol, drug abuse, car crashes, murders, suicides and fires combined.

"The tobacco industry spends more than \$200 million each year in Washington alone to create new smokers through deceptive marketing efforts," Selecky said. "We must continue to fight their mammoth marketing machine so that eventually our future generation will become tobacco free."

The Tobacco Prevention and Control Program has also been successful in reducing the number of youth who start smoking. Since the program started, there are 53,000 fewer youth smoking.

Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
--